

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 26

Tara Patel

Good morning friends and welcome back once again to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. As you all remember, in the previous lectures we have been talking about post-modern Indian English poets.

And in the previous lectures we talked about two major poets, namely Eunice de Souza and Lakshmi Kannan. Actually, credit goes to Eunice de Souza, who actually brought some major voices who were not paid too much attention fine, some major voices especially those of women's voices in her anthology entitled *Nine Indian Women Poets*.

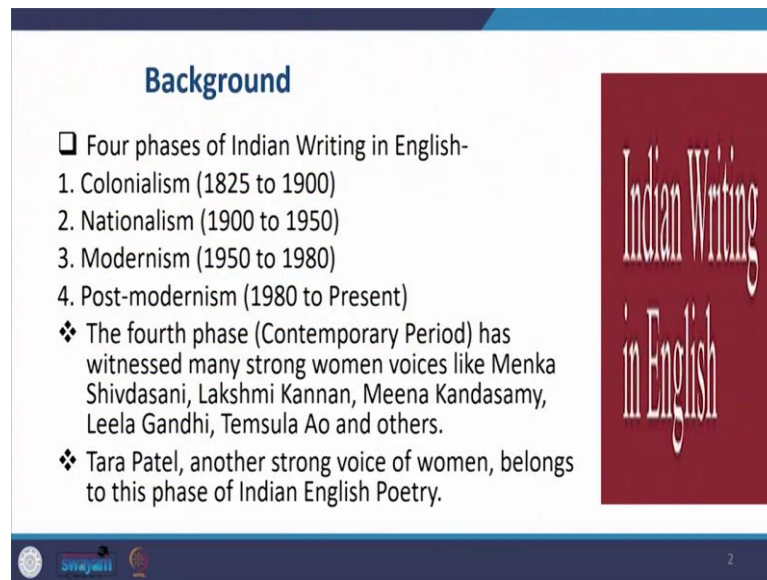
And today we are going to talk about one of the most significant major assertive voices of Indian English poetry, namely of Tara Patel. Friends, the worth of a poet usually we understand when a poet writes so many volumes and a poet has got so many collections to his or her credit.

But, you will be surprised to know that today we are going to talk about a poet who had got only one volume or only one collection to her credit yet the sort of spark, the sort of power, the sort of theme that she took upon actually made her a very revolutionary force to reckon with.

So, before we go to talk about Tara Patel's works and her poetic oeuvre, let us also talk about the background, the scenario which actually prevailed during the time when Tara Patel started writing. All of you are reminiscent of the fact that Indian poetry in English especially Indian writing in English has got 3 or 4 phases, the very first phase is as we have been talking about --the phase of colonialism when our poets were actually imitating their masters.

I mean the English or the British poets, some of them were imitating the British romantic poets, some of them were also imitating metaphysical poets or whatsoever.

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Background

- Four phases of Indian Writing in English-
 1. Colonialism (1825 to 1900)
 2. Nationalism (1900 to 1950)
 3. Modernism (1950 to 1980)
 4. Post-modernism (1980 to Present)
- ❖ The fourth phase (Contemporary Period) has witnessed many strong women voices like Menka Shivdasani, Lakshmi Kannan, Meena Kandasamy, Leela Gandhi, Tamsula Ao and others.
- ❖ Tara Patel, another strong voice of women, belongs to this phase of Indian English Poetry.

Indian Writing in English

And then came the new wave that is of nationalism from 1900 to 1950 and after Independence we have seen the rise of modernism and this modernism also affected Indian English poets.

Now, we are in the phase of post- modernism and in post- modernist phase which actually is influenced by many of the voices from different countries, from USA, from England and from some other neighboring countries as well.

So, the period from 1980 to the present can be considered to be the post-modernist phase of Indian writing in English. So, this fourth phase was not only having poets who were males, but women's voices also made themselves heard in this phase.

As I told you earlier, that we have already discussed poets like Eunice de Souza and Lakshmi Kannan, but then there are some other voices also who might not have contributed that much. Their voices were so forceful and in this regard we can talk about the voice of Tara Patel.

Needless to mention that in the lectures that follow later we will also be talking about Meena Kandasamy and then Tamsula Ao, Mamang Dai and many more. So, Tara Patel is one such strong voice of women's poetry which actually belongs to the period of this post-modernist phase of Indian poetry writing especially in English.

Now, since I have said that Tara Patel became famous only because of her one volume or only because of her one work, that was entitled *Single Women*.

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Tara Patel

- Born in 1949, educated in Gujarat and Malaysia
- Spent her first twenty years in Malaysia.
- Then came to Bombay where she begins to write poetry.
- Also came in contact with Nissim Ezekiel.
- Poet, Columnist and Journalist.
- Her only poetry collection- *Single Woman*, published in 1992.

Single Woman
Tara Patel
Rupa & Co.
CALCUTTA ALAHABAD BOMBAY DELHI
1992

Swajati 3

Now, in this collection you will find poetry which actually deliberates upon and discusses the themes which are confined and confined only to women's issues. Now, who was Tara Patel? Tara Patel actually was born in 1949, she had an early education in Gujarat and then she switched over to Malaysia where she spent many years specially twenty years in Malaysia.

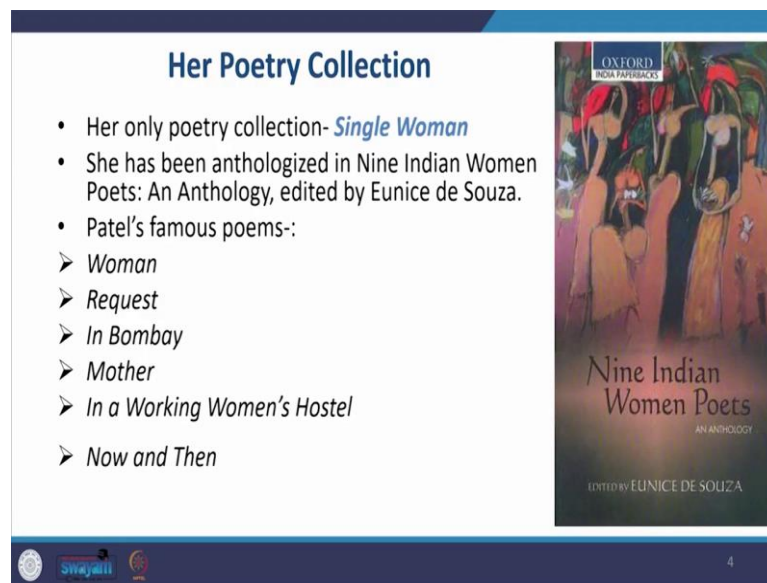
And then she came to Mumbai where she not only started writing, but she started working as a freelance journalist also, that was her job. She was also familiar with Nissim Ezekiel who not only supported, but also appreciated the efforts of this poet Tara Patel. Tara Patel is a poet, a columnist and a freelance journalist.

Her only collection entitled *Single Woman* was published in the year 1992. So, naturally when a poet writes in 90's, you can think about what sort of change the poet can bring about in his or her poetry.

So, one can find a vestige of revolution, because till now we have been talking about those women poets especially who have been trying to assert their own voices and they actually had been trying to write in a manner where one can say there was a sort of feminist concern.

But, too much of feminism or when the feminist voices started to be heard, then actually came some different topics. Sometimes it is not only about feministic voice, but it is also about the self because now, the woman has come out of her own right of being a feminist. And when the feminists actually allowed them this expression, this free expression naturally the poets took into their over some other questions, but as an exception Tara Patel was confined mostly to the issues of women's poems.

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Her Poetry Collection

- Her only poetry collection- *Single Woman*
- She has been anthologized in *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*, edited by Eunice de Souza.
- Patel's famous poems-:
 - *Woman*
 - *Request*
 - *In Bombay*
 - *Mother*
 - *In a Working Women's Hostel*
 - *Now and Then*

The slide also features an image of the book cover for *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*, edited by Eunice de Souza. The cover art depicts several women in traditional Indian attire, with one woman in the center holding a large red flower. The text on the cover includes 'OXFORD INDIA PAPERBACKS', 'Nine Indian Women Poets AN ANTHOLOGY', and 'EDITED BY EUNICE DE SOUZA'.

So, her lone collection entitled *Single Woman* has got many famous poems, some of the poems we shall take up for discussion. And in order to see how Tara Patel in a very transparent, in a very frank manner, in a very ruthless manner not only attacks the world of men but at the same time Tara Patel actually uses a language which is open, uses a language which does not have the subtlety of ambiguity or that poetic ambiguity which many people consider the it to be a sort of spark.

But what does Tara speak? Tara is very candid, very frank and she frankly also speaks and writes about the body, the women's body rather she very frankly talks about sexuality. So, this in a way became quite uncommon in a country like India, where the males were not writing anything so transparently about bodies.

But, when it comes to women writers or women poets, they have started writing in such a fashion. So, some of the poems included in the collection entitled *Single Woman* are titled "Woman", then comes "Request", then comes "In Mumbai" or Bombay, then

“Mother”, then “In a Working Women’s Hostel”, then “Now and Then” and there are many more poems.

We shall take up some of the poems in order to make our discussion more interesting and also to explore how Tara Patel, even though one can find the treatment of women by men in Tara Patel’s work and specially.

But then there is a different sort of opposition and the opposition is of misandry. I mean it appears, now they are not revolting against men, but rather there is actually a sort of yearning for desire and this desire can be satiated and fulfilled by men only.

Because in one poem after another, we can hear the voices of loneliness, the voices of alienation, the voices of dejection, the voices of despair, the voices of debasement, the voices of the neglect of the body, the voices of marriage, the voices of unfulfillment in a romantic marriage.

And at times there is also the illusion of love, which is actually transpired with in many of the writings of Tara Patel. Now, as I have been saying that Tara Patel’s themes actually were confined to women’s issues and since she had only one collection to her credit. Then whatever poem we can take up for the discussion, we will find that there is a sort of agonizing experience of women in the poems of Tara Patel.

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General Themes of Patel's Poetry

- ❖ Agonizing experiences of women
- ❖ Alienation, Despair, Existential Crisis
- ❖ Love and Relationship
- ❖ Challenge to the traditional norms
- ❖ Sexual Frustrations
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Conflict within Selves
- ❖ Expectation vs. Reality
- ❖ Corporeality of body

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And this agonizing experience is actually born of the unfulfilled desire and sometimes of being abandoned, sometimes of despair, sometimes there one can find a sort of existential crisis at times. Now, it is no more confined only to getting their equal rights which was actually one of the main aims of the feminist movement, but now there is actually a cry for love, for relationship.

So, majority of these women poets have actually been talking about relationships of men and women. There are at times challenges to the traditional norms, but then one cannot deny the fact that since there is a frank assertion of sex and sexual desires. So, there are sexual frustrations also depicted in the poetic oeuvre of Tara Patel. There are questions of unemployment, but then this unemployment has also been treated in a very different manner because this unemployment especially while dealing with the unemployment in major cities, where you know the poet says that the unemployed can sleep at any time of the day, the unemployed people and then you know while talking about that poem we shall come to that poem if time permits us.

So, there she talks about how the desire increases and how the unemployed people often when they get even a 10 rupee or a 20 rupee note or some money, I think they start thinking about so many things.


So, there is a conflict within selves, then we can also find a clash between expectation and reality. The world you expect of to be a sort of dreamy place, but at times it becomes a very dreary desert and then the theme of corporeality of the body is also working in majority of the poems.

So, since she has got only one collection, it is actually time that we took up some of the poems and let us start with the very important one which actually is entitled "Woman". I shall read some of the lines and it would not be possible to describe and discuss all the lines, but whenever there is a major line, where we find Tara Patel's voice, we can find. Because the persona in Tara Patel actually cries for a sort of voice and the voice for a sort of fulfillment. And then in such a way she actually talks about how the tradition always comes in and between, but such a tradition has actually to be revolted against. And that is why some of the poems of Tara Patel actually bring a sort of rebellion. But, then this rebellion she considers to be good, she considers to be better and let us have a look at these lines of this famous poem entitled "Woman".

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“Woman”

A woman’s life is a reaction to the crack of a whip. She learns to dodge it as it whistles around her but sometimes, it lands on the thick, distorted welt of her memory, reminding her of lessons learned in the past. Then in rebellion she turned her face to the whip, till pain become a river in flood wreaking vengeance.	She ran away to live as an escaped convict, or a refugee, or a yogi in wilderness of civilization. Beneath the thick, distorted self of her memory, she dreams, anyone could have touched baby-smooth skin with kisses.
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Where she says, “A woman’s life is a reaction/ to the crack of a whip,/” to the crack of a whip treatment of woman at the hands of men. “She learns to dodge it as it whistles/ around her/ but sometimes, it lands on the thick /distorted welt of her memory?”. You know, they have actually been used to a sort of subjugation, but this subjugation actually becomes a part of her memory.

The part of the memory of the persona and it keeps the persona haunting time and again. And what this welt of memory does? Reminding her of lessons learned in the past. So, here the poet; the poet actually takes us back to the past, where traditions were most revered and the women were and the women were supposed simply to be a sort of commodity, they were simply subjected to a sort of persecution.

But, now the time has come that the women can get out of it. Now, the woman can have a control of her own rights and duties. A freedom of her own choice. “Then in rebellion she turned her face/ to the whip,/ till pain become a river in flood/ wreaking vengeance.

Now, an attitude of revenge. Fine? It was only in the past that they could be subjected to any sort of persecution. But, now she has actually been able to turn her face to the whip, meaning thereby she can confront now, she can confront the years of tradition and she can revert it now. “She ran away to live as an escaped convict,/ or a refugee,/ or a yogi in wilderness of civilization.”

So, what the woman can do or what the women are supposed to do? She can run away from all these things. She can turn the tables upon the man-made world. And she can go to live as a sort of escaped, as an escaped convict fine, the simile being used here or a yogi in wilderness of civilization, 'beneath the thick distorted self of her memory'.

So, in her own memories she finds how women have been subjected to all sorts of persecution, sufferings, anguish, pain and what not, but then now she can look back and she can find her distorted self of memory. "She dreams", she keeps on thinking it comes to her in a dream, she dreams 'anyone could have touched baby smooth skin with kisses.'

And you know, we find a sort of self esteem, a sort of self sympathy is a sort of aggression that she wants to wage against the man-made world, but at the same time she says she dreams. Anyone could have touched baby's smooth skin with kisses, she is actually deprived of love. But, then in her welt of memories she goes back and she actually yearns for a sort of love. So, it appears that a woman who has been subjected to all sorts of trials and tribulations now.

Then when she stands face to face with their aggressors, she has only got a dream and in her dreams she thinks if somebody could be so compassionate, if somebody could shower the same lady with the kisses of a baby smooth skin on her. But, then this continues the sort of love that the woman is yearning for, this continues in one poem after another.

Actually, Tara Patel's poems are revolutionary in the sense, that not only does she talk about a woman who has been subjected to all sorts of suffering, but then in her heart of hearts, because now there is a sort of loneliness and the poet may also think of herself sandwiched between either a sort of lonely person or a loner it is only for the time to decide.

And so in her yearning, in her desire, in her craving, in her crazy body or in her crazy soul there comes a sort of request. And to whom is this request? This request is not to the feminist, but this request is to the men of the world and to the men who have actually left the women.

Because there is a new age where once you become conscious of your own rights, perhaps after few years you feel yourself like a lonely fellow, like a fellow who has been


abandoned. And then again the body and the heart actually crave for a sort of beseeching, they crave for a sort of request. So, we can also take some lines from another poem that is titled “Request”.

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Request

Sometimes for old times sake
you should look me up.
Have lunch with me, I'll pay the bill.
How little I know you though I loved
you for so long,
and still do for old times sake.

You cannot forget me so completely.
Remember me a little and meet me sometimes.
Once in a while for good luck,
do not negate the past,
Indulge me.



The slide features a photograph of a simple wooden dining table with two matching chairs. On the table, there is a small vase with green flowers and a white cup. The background is a plain, light color.

Sometimes, now in the earlier poem we talked about how the woman goes back to her welt of memory. Now, in her welt of memory, when she thinks of all bad things. Now, she imagines there is a different sort of imagination now and she imagines and in her imagination there is a request and she says---“Sometimes for old times sake/ you should look me up.”

Now, here is actually the desire of a woman who feels herself neglected, who feels herself deprived, who feels herself dejected, who feels herself as a castaway thing and she actually vouches and vies for a sort of love. And love of whom? Love of a man, love of a man who could satisfy her feelings, love of a man who could satisfy her carnal desires, who could satisfy her wills. What are those wills?

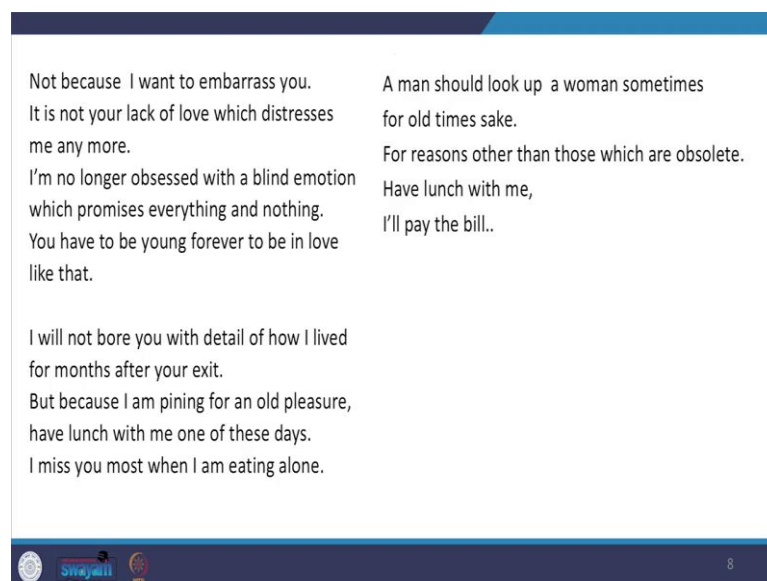
“You should look me up./ Have lunch with me, I will pay the bill./ How little I know you/ though I loved you for so long,/ and still do for old times sake.” There is actually a dig on the man’s world, but at the same time a woman who feels that she cannot leave alone. She always vies for a sort of companionship, for a sort of friend for somebody to give a sort of companionship and that is why she says- you should look me up, have lunch with me and you see the irony.

And she says that earlier the practice was that you wanted to oblige me, but now I want to oblige you, but only for myself, I will pay the bill. How little I know you, even though I loved you for so long and still do for old times sake. Can you? Because I have been left. Can you even for the sake of the old times, can you come? Can you have a lunch with me even at my own cost?

“You cannot forget me so completely. / Remember me a little and meet me sometimes. / Once in a while for a good luck,/ do not negate the past,/ indulge me in.”

The past, the memory which has always been very painful and perhaps we cannot forget this neither you nor I, but still even when you forget, can you really forget me completely? But, even for the sake of that love why do not you come for a good luck? Why do you want to negate the past? Because, we always say it is all over now it is all over, you have to forget things.

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Not because I want to embarrass you.
It is not your lack of love which distresses me any more.
I'm no longer obsessed with a blind emotion which promises everything and nothing.
You have to be young forever to be in love like that.

A man should look up a woman sometimes for old times sake.
For reasons other than those which are obsolete.
Have lunch with me,
I'll pay the bill..

I will not bore you with detail of how I lived for months after your exit.
But because I am pining for an old pleasure, have lunch with me one of these days.
I miss you most when I am eating alone.

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And the poem further—“Not because I want to embarrass you by unfolding the past”. I do not want to embarrass you. “It is not your lack of love which distresses me/ any more./ I am no longer obsessed with a blind emotion,/ which promises everything and nothing./ You have to be young forever to be in love like that.”

Actually, once this feminist phase is over or the women have been able to get back their due. Now, but then the aging process with times as one ages, as one has to live a life of

abandonment still one wants to revive one's old times by staying young forever to be in love like that. The love that we had that might have been sort of treacherous, but still I want to retreat, I want to get that love back.

“I will not bore you with detail of how I lived/ for months after your exit.” It actually talks about the disappointment and the dejection in love and still the persona here says, I will not embarrass you, I will not be talking about because you might be frustrated when I start unfolding the memory lane and I talk about alleging you how you exit, how you left me and had an exit.

But because “I am pining for an old pleasure,” pining for, yearning for, craving for thinking of have lunch with me one of these days. I miss you most when I am eating alone. So, here there is the persona not only talks of recovering or retreating to the old love, in order to get herself have the feeling that one has always to be young to be in love like that.

And then the last stanza, where she says a man should look up a woman sometimes for old times' sake. For reasons other than those which are obsolete. Reasons other than those which are obsolete. Have lunch with me, I will pay the bill.

So, I am ready to pay the bill and she says ‘pay the bill’, it can have different connotations, but then the poet, the persona here wants simply to revive in the memory, in order to have a sort of recovery. Recovery of the sort of loneliness and the abandonment that she is facing and that is why she says a man should look up a woman sometimes simply for old times' sake.

Time passes on, time flies fast we become aged, we become old. But, then we can still revive, we can still have a sort of assertion, still we can have a sort of satisfaction of our old-time love. So, every man should try to look up a woman sometimes for old times' sake.

Now, having seen and read this poem, you might have noted certain concerns or certain characteristic features of Tara Patel's poetry. Tara Patel's poetry when she talks about tradition, which actually binds a person tradition creates a sort of binding, but then we are advancing; advancing in terms of age, advancing with the situation that are around

us, the world is changing and in the changed world we should not say a goodbye to our old love.

The setting is Indian, but time and again you can find that there is a voice, there is a sort of outcry and this voice sometimes makes us feel that it is persona's personal voice. As regards language you can feel that the language flows very spontaneously, it does not have the use of vocabulary which is very difficult for people to understand rather the vocabulary is very simple.

Of course, as we take up some other poems, you will also find that how these single women have to face different situations in their life and especially in the metros where they have to face different realities, the realities of growing up, the realities of a working woman, the realities of aging. The reality of when you are sandwiched between social compulsions and your personal desire where the desire always is relegated to the back seat.

And then there is a stark reality of women's life, where their freedom which they are vying for and how this new freedom actually not only fills their own life with a sort of blessing, but there is actually a sort of disgust. There is also a sort of disillusionment, there is a note of alienation and loneliness, where people especially in metros they look for, where there is a lack of communication you will find.

You know the same lack of communication which T S Eliot has written or mentioned in one of his major collections entitled *The Waste Land* where the lady also feels herself to be very lonely. And she simply wants to talk to her own person, her own man who simply says—"Yes, I remember we are in a rat's alley where the dead men lost their bones."

So, there are talks of locked Indian womanhood, where there is a tradition and then there is also a critique of the dominance of man. Here we can take up one line which actually denotes the anguish of a lonely lady; a lady who has been left, a lady who is vying for companionship and a lady who finds her freedom bolted.

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Characteristic Features of Her Poetry

- ❖ Indian Setting
- ❖ Personal voice
- ❖ Free Verse and simple vocabulary
- ❖ Portrayal of working women
- ❖ Desire vs. societal compulsions
- ❖ Admission of the stark reality of women's life
- ❖ Longing for companionship
- ❖ Talks of "locked Indian womanhood".
- ❖ Critique of male dominance

Gift me a smile, a smile I can
float on,
warm myself in. Save myself.
A look, touch, word, smile-are all
on par (18-20)

swajati 9

“Gift me a smile, a smile I can float on,”. I have nothing in my life to claim. I have nothing in my life to clutch on, at least a smile can make my life easier.

Warm myself in, if you give me a smile, I can not only float on I can rather move on I can save myself. A look, a touch, word, smile-are all on par. I think a simile is just like a touch, it is just like a look. I mean here the lady talks about a sort of indifference with growing age how the solitary woman, suddenly becomes an object of indifference, an object which does not attract any attention.

So, there is a sort of cry, there is a sort of self-denial. Now, what the lady should do? And the lady now talks about how of now and then, I mean there is you know with the title of the poem only we can find that there is a sort of comparison of the two pictures. But, unless and until we go through the lines, we cannot understand the nitty-gritty and the beauty and the benignity where the lady as I said. A lady who actually being in a house, having all sorts of manifestations, having all sorts of facilities, feels a sort of loneliness, a sort of disintegrity, a sort of disintegrated self that the lady becomes.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:04)

The slide is titled "Of Now and Then" in a blue header. It contains two columns of text. The left column has three stanzas, and the right column has three stanzas. At the bottom of the slide, there is a dark blue footer with a logo on the left and the number "10" on the right.

"Of Now and Then"

You want to talk to someone.
You want to talk to someone seriously, quietly,
without the distraction of getting angry,
or crying, or touching.
You don't want to beg.

You want to talk to someone, not confidentially,
not in private:
the whole world must listen in.
You want to talk to someone because silence
is a kind of suicide.

You want to be 18, hike up a hill,
kiss beneath a lime tree in the light
of a hundred candles,
before a Catholic shrine.

The colour of zinnias burning in your eyes.

You want to eat oranges, try dodging raindrops,
make clouds in your coffee.
When did you last look into a mirror
and smile like a geranium petal?
When did you last dream?
When did you last get wet?

You want to talk and talk to someone
other than yourself.
In the end, you don't want to talk to anyone,
you want to keep quiet.
You want someone to talk to you!

10

And the lady says, "You want to talk to someone,". It is actually you know time and again you will find you, you, you and who is this you? This 'you' is none other than the persona of this poem.

"You want to talk to someone,/ you want to talk to someone seriously,/ quietly, without the distraction of getting angry,/ of crying, or touching/ you do not want to beg." Now, the time has come then when the persona feels herself for himself alone and in this period of loneliness she simply wants to talk to someone.

And talk to someone very seriously, very quietly she is not at all bothered about what the people will say now. So, see the new voice, the new women's voice she is not at all bothered about what the world will say. "You want to talk to someone, not confidentially,/ not in private,/ the whole world must listen in/ you want to talk to someone because/ silence is a kind of suicide."

My dear friends, the contemporary world has become such where people living in the same tower, in the same apartment, are all divided individual selves separated, there are many new things that are developing. And the poetess has very beautifully mentioned here and she says, now the time has come.

Then when I am thinking of talking to someone seriously and I am not at all worried about what the people will say because now this silence is a killer, this silence will kill

me, this silence is just like a suicide, has not a time come when with growing age all of us become a thing of neglect.

And we want that we should be paid attention to and especially somebody who was loved once upon a time and then somebody who is actually yearning, longing to hear the voices of love, the voices of compassion, the voices of cordiality, the voices of commitment.

“You want to be 18, hike up a hill.” Again, goes well the well of memory. You want to be 18, you want to go back ‘kiss beneath a lime tree in the light/ of a hundred candles,/ before a Catholic shrine.” No regulations now, I want to go back to enjoy the pleasures of the past and then the new woman does not bother about what people will say. “The colour of zinnias burning in your eyes.” The desire just like the beautiful zinnia flower. Here the poet actually talks about the zinnia flower which is planted and grown in America, fine.

And then is she is not confined only to long for a talk, rather she also says—“You want to eat oranges, try dodging raindrops,/ make clouds in your coffee./ When did you last look into a mirror?” Age has come upon you and when did you last look up into a mirror and ‘smile like a geranium petal?/ When did you last dream?/ When did you last get wet?” When did you last became emotional? When did you last became romantic?

So, the old days actually are haunting at the back of the mind of the lady. You want to talk and talk to someone other than yourself. Now, you do not want to talk to yourself because this silence cuts you to the quick, you want to have a sort of companion fine. This isolation in a metro city you know, it is actually killing people. Every now and then you know people appear to be quite alone.

“In the end you do not want to talk to anyone,/ you want to keep quiet,/ you want someone to talk to you.” You have talked to yourself too much. So, there is a sort of introspection now and you know you cannot talk to yourself anymore, rather you want someone to talk to you.

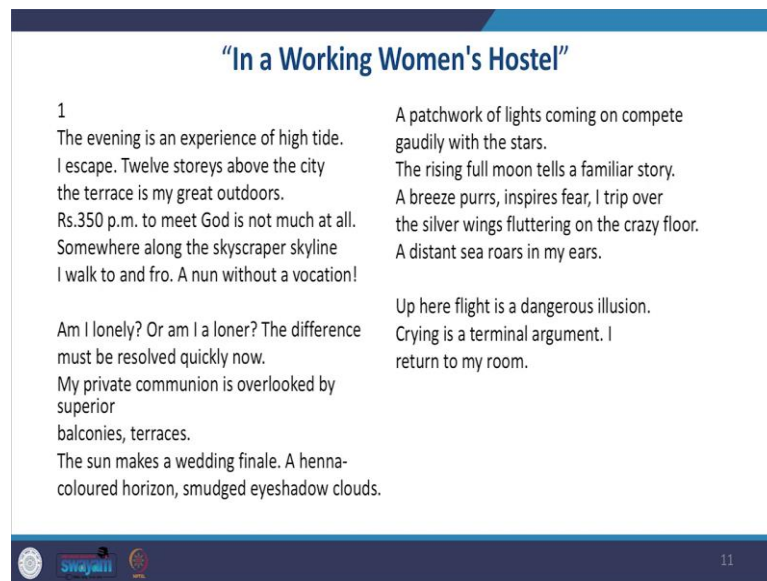
Someone should ask you about how you are, someone should ask you about how your days are passing by, someone should say some amount of sympathy, some amount of

compassion, some amount of love, some amount of concern, because this aging will not stop.

And this aging and this passing on, sometimes becoming a loner, sometimes living in a women's hostel and then there is another poem which is entitled "In a Working Women's Hostel." This actually talks about the fate of those women who have to take their shelters in the hostel, because at least in the hostel they could get some companions.

At least in a hostel they can come across some other people and especially in a women's hostel, where they can share their joys, where they can share their sorrows and the lines of the poem are very beautiful, my dear friends. So, let us look at some of the lines even though time is always wanting, but then we can always continue.

(Refer Slide Time: 35:24)



The slide displays the poem "In a Working Women's Hostel" in two columns. The title is centered at the top in blue. The poem is numbered '1' and is presented in a clean, sans-serif font. The background of the slide is white with a blue header and footer. The footer contains the Swayam logo and the number '11'.

"In a Working Women's Hostel"

1

The evening is an experience of high tide.
I escape. Twelve storeys above the city
the terrace is my great outdoors.
Rs.350 p.m. to meet God is not much at all.
Somewhere along the skyscraper skyline
I walk to and fro. A nun without a vocation!

Am I lonely? Or am I a loner? The difference
must be resolved quickly now.
My private communion is overlooked by
superior
balconies, terraces.
The sun makes a wedding finale. A henna-
coloured horizon, smudged eyeshadow clouds.

A patchwork of lights coming on compete
gaudily with the stars.
The rising full moon tells a familiar story.
A breeze purrs, inspires fear, I trip over
the silver wings fluttering on the crazy floor.
A distant sea roars in my ears.

Up here flight is a dangerous illusion.
Crying is a terminal argument. I
return to my room.

"The evening is an experience of high tide.../ Twelve storeys above the city/. You know the persona of this poem, goes to the terrace, because you know inside there is complete silence, inside there is isolation. Goes to the terrace in order to see the world moving, in movement alone is rest my dear friends.

Or you see how she questions herself—"Am I lonely? Or am I a loner?" So, there is a sort of conflict, there is a sort of self-doubt and she thinks have I been left alone or am I a loner, is it my fate? Is it my attitude? "The difference must be resolved quickly now./ My private communion is overlooked by superior/ balconies and terraces/. And then as the

lines move further, she says—‘a patchwork of lights coming on compete gaudily/ with the stars./The rising full moon tells a familiar story.’

So, there is an analogy between the full moon and the lady here. So, thinks about how the moon also is alone. “A breeze purrs, inspires fear, a trip over.” Now, see the beautiful use.

So, when we whenever we talk about the word ‘purr’ we are suddenly reminded of cat and when we are reminded of cat we are reminded of the sort of fear, that the cat very beautifully purrs. “The silver wings fluttering on the crazy floor./ A distant sea roars in my ears.”

So, from the terrace I can come across all sorts of feelings and look at the sky, look at the sea and then I can hear a sort of roar inside. “Up here, flight is a dangerous illusion,/ crying is a terminal argument./ I return to my room.” So, having found nothing, having simply found some analogies of loneliness I come back to my room.

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Waking up at night is a symptom of aging.
I kick aside the warm weather of my blanket,
the touch of my own thighs, breasts,
is an embarrassment.
In the winter cold I fold myself up in supplication
to hear myself more clearly.

'A woman can feed herself. Love begins
with a man.'
And so on and so on. The colour of bones
is in my hair now
and I have come to a standstill.
The passing days have a posthumous
touch to them.

Listening to my own confessions is a
third-degree past-time.
I function as a one-woman courtroom.
I have sealed up my life, black envelopes
addressed to no one in particular.
'Confidential. It is the rough wool of a man
you want tonight and every night.'

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And in the second part the persona says, waking up at night is a symptom of aging’. You know what actually makes us all revere Tara Patel is the way her line flows without any inhibitions, without any botheration, but there is a natural flow and she says—“I kick aside the warm weather.../ When there is loneliness, nobody, no companion then I suddenly retreat to my own self.

I look at my own limbs, I actually ‘touch of my own thighs.... is an embarrassment/ in the winter cold I try to fold myself up in supplication/ to hear myself more clearly.’ It is actually very confessional you know.

And she says---“ Listening to my own confessions is a/ third-degree past-time./ I function as a one-woman court room./ I have sealed up my life in black envelopes.” So, black stands for darkness, black stands for negation addressed to no one in particular.

So, what is there? I find myself that I have no companion with me. No one to come and join me as a companion and I find I have sealed up my life in black envelopes addressed to no one in particular, ‘ to no one in particular.’ But then, ‘Confidential. It is the rough wool of a man you want tonight and every night.’

So, the bodily-- the carnal desires and then towards the end she says—“A woman can feed herself, love begins/ with a man.” You know to live alone is of course, a very difficult task and you need human companion.

So, here the woman talks about a woman’s desire, but then we have seen and many other poems of some other poets where even you know other poets have also mentioned about this loneliness fine. And then they have actually been longing for human accompaniment and so on and so on.

“The colour of bones/ is in my hair now/ and I have come to a standstill,”. It appears as if everything has come to a standstill. “The passing days have a posthumous/ touch to them”. Now, I do not feel any touch. Now, I do not have any regret, because now I am still, yet I think of I think of my own confession am I lonely or am I a loner. So, this conflict between the self, between the body and the soul continues in one poem after another.

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Elements of Indianness in Patel's Poetry

- ➔ Imagery:- Gulmohar, Sindoor, Saree
- ➔ Mythological characters from Indian mythology:- Ram, Sita, Krishna, yogi
- ➔ Setting:- Her poetry has been set in Indian cities like Bombay.

“ An interesting feature of Patel's verse is the sparseness of imagery in it. It is a poetry of transparent directness. It is perhaps here that the influence of Ezekiel is to be seen. It is unfortunate that Patel ceased to publish after her first collection.” (Naik)

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So, having discussed all these now, we can find that Tara Patel's poetic world is full of Indianness, where you can find about certain traditions, where you can also find about the use of many Indian words in the form of imagery: Gulmohar, Sindoor, Poetry, Saree all these things are there you know. There are mythological characters also getting mentioned in the poetic world of Tara Patel, where she talks about Ram, Sita, Krishna, Yogi and all.

Majority of her poems have got Indian settings and it would not be a sort of exaggeration to quote here what M K Naik says about Tara Patel. What he says is that interesting feature of Patel's verse is 'the sparseness of imagery in it.'

A sparseness of imagery in it, 'it is a poetry of transparent directness.' One can find that the language is very direct. It is perhaps here that the influence of Ezekiel is to be seen. You must remember that Ezekiel was a great support and Ezekiel had also influenced Tara Patel too much.

So, it is unfortunate what he says is, 'it is unfortunate that Patel ceased to publish after her first collection. She did not have any other collection after her first work.'

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Themes Explained

- ❑ **Despair and existential crisis-** Her poems have a tone of disappointment and surrender to social norms. Although her single woman fights but this society does not allow her to live on her own terms.
"You think the world owes you a living,
It does not,
It does not even work for you." (*Birthday Notes 1983*)
- ❑ **Alienation-** It's one of the most prominent themes of her poetry.
"You want to talk to someone because silence
is a kind of suicide." (*Now and Then*)

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But, then the amount of knowledge, the amount of pain, suffering, the amount of anguish which we have found in Tara Patel's poetry is full of despair and existential crisis, where in one poem after another you can find a note of despair as if in as if in some other poem where we find a sort of alienation in "Now and Then", where she talks about, "you want to talk to someone because silence is a kind of suicide." Such powerful lines that we come across fine.

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- ❑ **Challenge to the male hegemony-** Her *Single Woman* is a challenge to the constructed nature of society.
"I cannot live like you, mother,
maintain the status quo.
I've moved out of square one.
I cannot be a dutiful daughter." (*Mother*)
- ❑ **Relationship-** Her longing for companionship is revealed through her poetry but again she has no freedom to chose her love.
"But you are cursed by your parents
you cannot love voluntarily." (*A Kind of Freedom*)

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So, and then in a way she challenges the male hegemony, but then as Bruce King has rightly said that ‘there is actually a treatment of women by men, but then the opposition is not a sort of misandry. I mean in earlier poets we have found that they have talked about man’s indifference’.

But, here we find the persona of Tara Patel actually vies for, yearns for human company for men’s company and that is why she says--- “You are cursed by your parents/ you cannot love voluntarily.”

So, again there is a dig on the tradition and she says that all sorts of relationships, have been hampered because you cannot love voluntarily, you cannot love somebody because you want to love or because you have a choice.

Now, there are quite many things in Tara Patel’s world, but then we can find that Tara Patel is free from the mention of sexual taboos and all. She actually at times appears to be very unconventional, but what she speaks comes out from the depth of her heart. We can take one very important poem entitled, “Calangute Beach.” We can take some of the lines before we come to end this talk.

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<p>When we met his 'Hello' was quick, mine slow Coconut oil ripened colour on his body. After lunch our conversation was too long. Exchanging notes on east and west I asked his name, he didn't ask mine.</p>	<p>Both of us knew, There was no time for the persuasions I needed. I should have gone to share the sun's wine with him. In such a man's arms it must be permanently afternoon.</p>
<p>The matrimonial ads in the Indian newspapers amused him. His invitation to go swimming naked was turned down A long brown look accentuated the loneliness of my inhibitions.</p>	<p>A goodbye can be a hug and 'Women's lib in India is skin-deep, baby.' For weeks I can brood of nothing else. He is a growing regret, a red bulb off and on reminding me of men I cannot afford. (" Calangute Beach, Goa")</p>

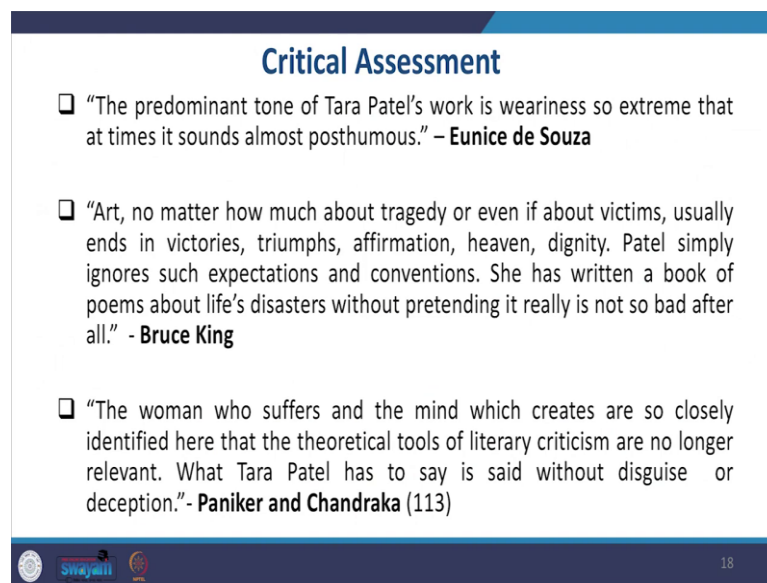
When in this poem; the poem is entitled, “Calangute Beach”, where she talks about how she denied the advances to an American, for whom she had her longing, but then she could not because the persona in this poem is actually an Indian. And she says,

His invitation to go swimming naked
was turned down.
A long brown look accentuated the loneliness
of my inhibitions.

And then what is of utmost importance is when the poet says –‘both of us knew,/ there was no time for persuasion/ I needed,/ I should have gone to share the sun’s wine with him./ In such a man’s arms, /it must be permanently afternoon.’. In such a man’s arms there must be pleasure, there must be complete happiness.

But then again, she takes a dig where she says, “Women’s lib in India is skin deep, baby,’/ for weeks I can brood of nothing else./ He is a growing regret.” She shows a regret, he is a growing regret, the denial to him was a sort of regret and then a very beautiful metaphor is being used here, ‘like a red bulb off and on reminding me of men/ I cannot afford,” because traditions come in and between.

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Critical Assessment

- ❑ “The predominant tone of Tara Patel’s work is weariness so extreme that at times it sounds almost posthumous.” – **Eunice de Souza**
- ❑ “Art, no matter how much about tragedy or even if about victims, usually ends in victories, triumphs, affirmation, heaven, dignity. Patel simply ignores such expectations and conventions. She has written a book of poems about life’s disasters without pretending it really is not so bad after all.” - **Bruce King**
- ❑ “The woman who suffers and the mind which creates are so closely identified here that the theoretical tools of literary criticism are no longer relevant. What Tara Patel has to say is said without disguise or deception.”- **Paniker and Chandraka** (113)

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And that is how I find life to be lived alone, life to be lived without any companion. So, having discussed all these we can take some of the critical assessments or critical views about Tara Patel very quickly where Eunice de Souza what she says is—“ Patel’s work is weariness, so extreme that it sounds almost posthumous.”

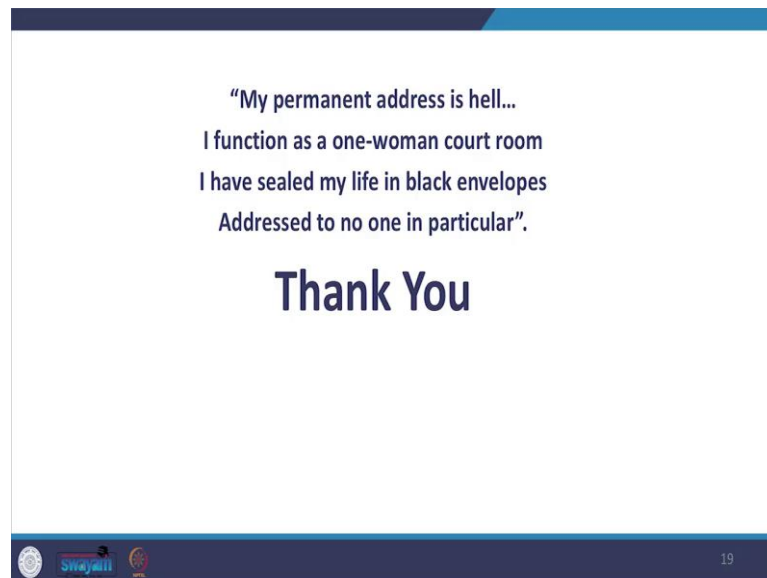
And what Bruce King has said, “ Art, no matter how much about tragedy or even if victims, usually end in victories, triumph, affirmation, heaven, dignity.” Patel simply ignores such expectations and conventions, she actually is unconventional as I have been

saying. She has written a book of poems about life's disaster without pretending it really is not so bad after all.

So, Patel does not consider herself to be a poet, but then as readers when we read her poems, we find the real poet that Patel was. And Paniker and Chandraka in their article say, 'the woman who suffers and the mind which creates are so closely identified here.' I mean the woman who suffers and the mind that creates are the one and not two.

What Tara Patel has to say it, said without any disguise, without any deception, without any inhibition. And that is what we have been belabouring over in this lecture and I think that we have been able to understand the real worth of Tara Patel.

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And before I close let me take a very important line from Tara Patel who says,

"My permanent address is hell..." and further you already remember, when she says, "I function as a one-woman court room./ I have to decide for myself, because in my court/ I see my cases being discussed and it is my own courtroom, "I have sealed my life in black envelopes/ addressed to no one in particular."

I think with this we have to wind up this talk. Thank you very much. I wish you all a very good day ahead. Thank you, waiting for you to discuss on another topic where we shall discuss another woman poet named Menka Shivdasani. Thank you very much.